

May is...

American Wetlands Month

What are wetlands? Why are they important?

Wetlands are the link between land and water, where the flow of water, the cycling of nutrients and the energy of the sun meet to produce a unique ecosystem characterized by hydrology, special soils and vegetation. Wetlands provide numerous benefits, including habitat for flora and fauna, improved water quality, flood abatement, water storage and groundwater recharge, reduced erosion, support of fisheries and opportunities for education and recreation. Wetlands may not be wet year-round. In fact, some of the most important wetlands are seasonally-dry transition zones.

Many communities are now exploring how to best protect their existing wetland resources and restore some of the thousands of acres that have been lost or degraded. Active citizens are working to protect this critical feature of the environment for future generations.

May is the month to recognize and celebrate the wonderful ways wetlands enrich the environment and people. It is a time to give back to the environment by learning more about wetlands and participating in the many scheduled events. The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) is proud to join with other federal and private partners celebrating American Wetlands Month each May. Events are scheduled across the country to educate, involve and engage Americans who want to better understand the value of one of Earth's vital ecosystems.



Why Celebrate Wetlands?

Wetlands are among the most valuable but least understood of all natural resources. They provide rich habitat for wildlife. They are places in which many animals and birds build nests and raise their young. Migrating birds stop over in wetlands to rest and to feed. We celebrate wetlands each May when they are teeming with new animal and plant life.

Wetlands benefit our communities as well. They replenish and clean water supplies and reduce flood risks, provide recreational opportunities and aesthetic benefits. They serve as sites for scientific research and education, and benefit commercial fishing.

Unfortunately, wetlands have been misunderstood for many years, often viewed as wastelands to be drained and converted to other uses. But if wetlands disappear, water will not be as clean, fish and bird populations will suffer, and the frequency and severity of floods will increase. Americans have begun to recognize the value of wetlands, and the rate of loss has declined dramatically over the last 30 years. It is important that we continue to stop the loss of wetlands and begin to achieve a net gain through better management and restoration. Learn how you can help by discovering more about wetlands and participating in events celebrating American Wetlands Month.



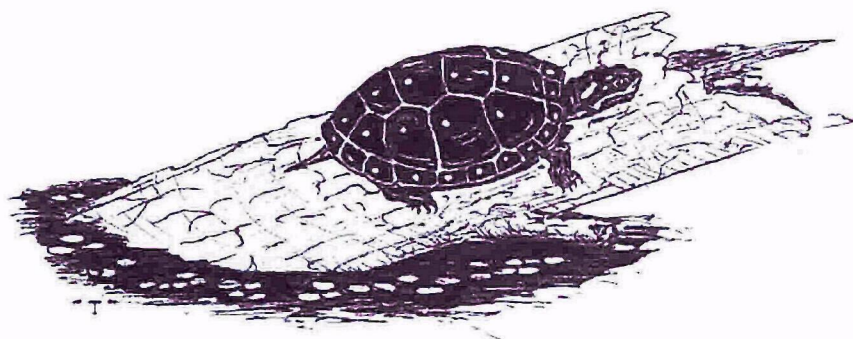
Canoeists at the District of Columbia's Camp Riverview explore the coastal wetlands located near their site.

Wetland Programs

EPA's Wetlands Division, part of the Office of Wetlands, Oceans, and Watersheds, works to restore and maintain the nation's waters and aquatic resources, including wetlands, by developing flexible and effective wetland programs and policies. The Division distributes sound scientific information and encourages states, tribes and local governments to include wetlands protection and restoration in their watershed planning efforts.

Wetland Protection and You

American Wetlands Month showcases the importance of wetlands. It also reminds us that government regulations and zoning restrictions are not enough to protect and restore wetlands. Citizens must also participate in wetland protection efforts. You can identify your watershed and find any wetlands in your neighborhood by visiting the National Wetlands Inventory site at www.nwi.fws.gov. Caring, devoted volunteers can make a big difference.



History of American Wetlands Month

American Wetlands Month was begun in 1991 by EPA and its partners in federal, state, tribal, and local governments, and private and nonprofit organizations, as a way to educate Americans about the functions and values of wetlands. Annual events, including national and regional conferences, have been staged. A broad range of people with ties to wetlands, including scientists, educators, and public interest groups, participate in these events and celebrations. The annual celebration of American Wetlands Month in May inspires and empowers people to work throughout the year to protect and expand wetlands. For more information on what you can do to take part, visit the EPA website below.

The Environmental Law Institute's National Wetlands Awards are a highlight of each year's celebration. They honor individuals from across the country who demonstrate extraordinary effort, innovation and excellence in wetland conservation. For more information on these awards, see www.eli.org.

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Wetland Resources

On the Internet

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| Environmental Protection Agency | www.epa.gov/owow/wetlands |
| National Audubon Society | www.audubon.org |
| Frog Watch | www.usgs.gov/education |
| USDA's Backyard Conservation Guide | www.nrcs.usda.gov/feature/backyard |
| Volunteer Monitor Newsletter | www.epa.gov/owow/wetlands/monitor/#vol |
| Izaak Walton League of America | www.iwla.org/sos/awm |
| National Marine Fisheries Service Restoration Center | www.nmfs.noaa.gov |
| United States Fish and Wildlife Service | www.fws.gov |
| U.S. Army Corps of Engineers | www.usace.army.mil |
| The Association of State Wetland Managers | www.aswm.org |
| U.S. Forest Service | www.usda.fs.gov |